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ABSTRACT

The author speculates on the results of a change in perceptions of "community," currently seen as the territory of the taxpayer, with his right to set rules through his representative, the board of trustees. The board members, usually conservative businessmen, do not truly represent the community, but they hire the administrators and, through them, all the staff. The staff, however, only seems beholden to the board and soon forms its own constituency. When staff and board disagree, or when he is caught between the board and students and area residents, the president becomes more mediator than leader. A new view of community is not as a taxpayer bloc, but as many elements that contribute to the life of the college, including administrative leadership, staff dedication, faculty creativity, students, and their families. A model board to represent all these elements might have seven seats--three for taxpayers (maybe for women, minorities, and employees of commerce) and four for the president, a faculty member, a sophomore, and a graduate or adult evening student. Power would rest with those contributing most in knowledge and involvement. Changes under such representation would include: recognition of political reality, not the myth of public-spirited service; more interest in education, less in finances; easier resistance to political pressure; removal of some causes of student unrest; no more blaming "the board" for any group's own inadequacies; a colleague relationship instead of paternalism. (HH)

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D R A F T

A Different Perception of the Community in Community College

Charles C Collins
October 28, 1969

Preface

When Reed invited me to visit Chabot he even promised a half hour of time with you to preach whatever revolutionary doctrine I might be peddling these days provided that it had to do with relationships with students and that it be positive and constructive.

I found this invitation more difficult than you might think for it is a lot easier to be negative and destructive than it is to be positive and constructive. I thought for a while I would use a paper I wrote as a companion piece to Pat Cross' The Junior College Student: A Research Description in which I speculate on the implication of all the data she has gathered on j.c. students. As a matter of fact, I brought about 10 copies which I will leave for distribution to your divisions or departments and, hopefully, for your reading.

Even so, I rejected using this paper because the more I have thought about student relationships, the more convinced I have become that the positive and constructive lies within the political realm, within political structure. I would like to explore a far-out position--one that I know isn't legal and one that I know isn't likely to be made legal the day after tomorrow. Since it is far out and since I'm a little nervous that some of you will say "faculty meetings shouldn't be used for blowing pipe dreams, for describing fantasies," I underline the fact that I also brought you an alternative--a paper based on respectable research data.

So be indulgent, suspend disbelief and listen to my imagining. It may prompt you to think of something much much better.

Theoretical Lead

I have been impressed for a long time with the gestalt construct that stabilized perceptions or mind-sets are the first step in the logical progression of one's thought--and the corollary of that; if the initial and basic perception

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is changed then the whole subsequent pattern changes.

To get to the point, I would like to speculate along with you on what pattern would follow if we rejected the conventional perception of community and substituted a new and perhaps more complex and more accurate image of the community.

Present Perception of Community

The usual picture we have of community is that piece of geography out there filled with taxpayers--or, more generously, with taxpaying citizens. A certain logical pattern follows from this perception:

a. Those people out there created the college. They pay for it. He who pays the piper should call the tune. The purpose, the policy, the rules, the regulations should ultimately rest in their hands. Obviously, this final authority, this ultimate power can't rest in all their hands so it gets concentrated in their elected representatives, the Board of Trustees.

b. No doubt Chabot is an exception, however the E.T.S. study on college trustees showed the representatives not be be very representative. It showed the usual public j.c. trustee to be male, White, Protestant, 50 earning $25,000+ per year and most likely a business man who hears the voice of the people at his Rotary luncheon. It also showed them to be more conservative and more repressive of students than any trustees other than trustees of fundamentalist church colleges.

c. This board hires the president, hires the administrative staff, and indirectly but technically hires every instructor on the faculty.

> To a greater or lesser degree, then, all these people are beholden to the board. Many board members would see the staff as their employees. They serve at the board's pleasure. By this perception, the staff's power is delegated to them by these representatives of the community. By this perception, those who exercise power have as their constituency the elected representatives of the community.

Qualifiers and Disclaimers

But you know, and I know, that it doesn't all work out as neatly and as simply as this. A president couldn't operate very long without developing the faculty as part of his constituency and occasionally using this power against the power of the board. Once appointed, the faculty can and does band together into a power bloc which can move in quite a different, even opposite direction from the White, male, Protestant square, middle class, middle aged, conservative board. Once organized and with tenure, the faculty represents a different constituency which the president and his administrative staff may, or may not, lead. If they begin pulling and hauling in a different direction than the board, the president really has a split constituency and may, as Clark Kerr analyzed it, be more mediator than leader.

No Black President can ignore his Black student constituency nor his Black adult constituency in the ghetto. Potentially, the students could become a bigger, more fractious power bloc even than the faculty--and on many campuses they have already become so, polarizing things so that the president and his administrative staff are not even mediators but simply buffers, fairly well paid stand-ins to take all the blows that are really directed at the board and the city, state, and national politicians who loom up as models and determinants of Board thinking and Board action. Many presidents and other administrators have, or are about to, resign because they have no real student or faculty constituency

and the narrow, perhaps reactionary policies of their boards force them into the role of whipping boy.

A Different Perception of Community

Now let me suggest a different perception of community and explore what power dynamics would flow from it. Different groups of people are involved to different degrees in a social agency such as a college. The college isn't created by equal efforts by all the people in a geographical area. Tax dollars alone don't build the college or sustain it. The in-put is a lot more than money. The in-put includes the molding and bending cement of administrative leadership (and I should add the loyal dedicated work of the non-certificated staff). The in-put includes the collective and massive and on-going creativity of the faculty. The in-put includes the energy expended and the pluralistic contributions of the present and of the past, of the day and of the evening students.

What I am getting at here, is that there are really several primary groups within the community and if you perceive the community this way then you are likely to arrive at some structure of governance congruent with this perception: a structure that will give different weights, different strength of voice, to groups making different degrees of contribution--of in-put.

A Model to Fit This Perception

Without being forced to defend all aspects of it, let me present for purpose of illustration a model of a governing board that would approach proportional representative--proportional, that is, to the contribution and involvement of groups that really make up the community of the community college. We will make it a seven-man board and reserve three of the seven seats for the taxpayer-citizens and will leave it a wide open election (although good argument could be

made for a nominating committee system that would assure a voice for women, a voice for the ethnic minorities and a voice for business and industry ((employees))). The fourth seat in this model would be held ex officio by the superintendent-president who would use the authority of his knowledge and his vote to support the wide angle view of administration. I don't know if this is a good precedent to cite but I'll risk noting the fact that President Hitch has such a vote on the U.C. Board of Regents. The fifth seat on this model board would be reserved for the elected representative of the faculty. The sixth board position would be held by a full-time sophomore student elected by the students from a panel of students who had been interested enough in district governance to have been dedicated board-watchers during their freshman year. The last seat would be filled by a graduate alumnus or an adult evening division student elected by resident alumni and adult evening students. So--in this model power would emanate from clusters or groups within the community who have intimate knowledge, who have deep involvement and who have made significant contributions.

Consequent Shift in Dynamics

To return to my opening idea: if initial perception changes then the whole subsequent pattern changes. If our perception of community were changed from taxpayer-citizens, to clusters of deeply involved groups, then the composition of the governing board would have to change to give representation to these clusters and this would shift the dynamics closer, in my view, to political reality. Let me see if I can spell out some of these changes in subsequent pattern:

1. There would be a franker recognition that the whole educational scene is a political one. The frazzled myth that the board is simply a body of public spirited selfless objective, apolitical citizens would be discarded.

2. There would be reasonable if not complete assurance that the board would have some champions for education as well as champions for the taxpayers and for economy.
3. Local boards, no longer being carbon copies in political persuasion to statewide boards and the politicians who appoint them, would be much more resistent to the pressures from above, from city hall and from Sacramento and from Washington.
4. A board composed of administration, faculty, students and general citizens would tend to reduce if not eliminate the we-they dichotomy for the political process would be substituted for the eye-ball to eye-ball confrontations. There would be shifting alliances on the board according to the issues and, no doubt, there would be the political horse-trading that this suggests.
5. Student representation on the board would, of course, give short shrift to present faculty or administrative resistence to student participation on the policy committees of the college. This should remove some of the cause of student unrest. And, since most representatives on the board would really know something about the relevancy of the curriculum and of instruction, perhaps we would enjoy more action and less talk about making education relevant.
6. Faculty, students and administration could no longer have the complaint nor the cop-out of saying that they could only advise or recommend on policy but never set it. Their voting record on policy issues would be there for all to see.
7. The paternalism of "giving" faculty and students a minor say in directing that which is central to their lives, the college, would be ended and with the end of paternalism should come a colleague relationship and more equal status all around.

8. Finally, with such a board, the president would not find himself so frequently in the role of mercenary fighting off faculty and student attacks on board policies and rulings with which he himself does not agree. Faculty and students would be less inclined to see him as a sell-out to the board. Their animosity would be better directed toward their own representatives on the board.

Well, I'm sure you could dream up other and perhaps better models and could trace out even more attractive results flowing from your model. The point I'll leave you with is this: we need to check the accuracy of our perception of community and then work toward a political structure that would truly reflect and give voice to the actual, the real community that we discover.

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